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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 KINSHASA 000405

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SUBJECT: EASTERN KASAI: UDPS FANS TENSIONS

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Classified By: PolOff CBrown, reasons 1.4 b/d.

¶1. (C) Summary: PolOff and EconOff conducted a two-day visit February 23-24 to Mbuji-Mayi, the capital of Eastern Kasai province. During the trip, emboffs met with a variety of local officials, political party representatives and MONUC staff to assess the political, economic and security situations in the region. Eastern Kasai is largely stable in the pre-election period, but like its sister province, Western Kasai, political tensions and general misunderstandings of the electoral process could result in civil unrest in the coming months. End summary.

¶2. (C) PolOff and EconOff visited February 23-24 the capital of Eastern Kasai province, Mbuji-Mayi, to assess the state of political and economic affairs in this politically-volatile and diamond-rich region. (A report on economic conditions and the province's diamond industry will follow septel.) Eastern Kasai is a poor province, with little infrastructure or agricultural base, despite the potential revenue from the region's diamond mines. Its economic situation notwithstanding, Eastern Kasaians are very active politically, as Mbuji-Mayi is the traditional home base of the opposition Union for Democracy and Social Progress (UDPS). Consequently, most political discourse is aimed against the international community and the transitional government for their supposed efforts to exclude the UDPS (and, it argues, Kasaians in general) from the political process.

UDPS REGISTRATION

¶3. (C) Much like their counterparts in Kananga (reftel), UDPS representatives in Mbuji-Mayi were argumentative in demanding "equitable" treatment of their party in the electoral process. UDPS provincial president Tsana Tshilumbayi said his party "regretted" what the International Committee to Accompany the Transition (CIAT) had done to exclude the UDPS and its President, Etienne Tshisekedi, from registering to vote. Tshilumbayi said he felt "deceived" by CIAT's refusal to get the UDPS involved in the transitional government. Tshilumbayi noted that registration centers in the provinces

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of Bandundu and Equateur were open well after the December constitutional referendum, which would unfairly advantage those areas at the expense of the Kasais. He claimed the Independent Electoral Commission (CEI) was more than capable of reopening centers in other provinces while still preparing for elections before June 30. (Note: Again, UDPS officials --

be they in Kinshasa or in the provinces -- push a revisionist history regarding the role of CIAT in the electoral process. It was the UDPS and Tshisekedi himself who chose not to take part in the transitional government and to boycott the registration process and the constitutional referendum. In addition, the CEI extended enrollment in Bandundu and Equateur only because not all centers there were open for the three-week legal minimum before the referendum. Centers in the Kasais were opened for far longer. In any case, the issue is a red herring in that UDPS supporters, including those in Eastern Kasai, registered in large numbers. As for Tshisekedi and other UDPS leaders who did not register, the CEO has already made provisions that they can register to vote at the same time they file their papers to run for office. End note.)

14. (C) PolOff explained to UDPS officials that neither the CIAT, nor the USG, had done anything to exclude the party from elections. In fact, the UDPS had been encouraged at every step to engage in the process. PolOff pointed out that UDPS supporters who wished to run as candidates would be allowed to register to vote at the same time they registered their candidacies -- a decision made by the CEI and supported by the international community. Tshilumbayi and other UDPS officials present responded that such measures would not allow the "tens of thousands" of UDPS supporters to register, thereby putting the UDPS at a disadvantage.

15. (C) Tshilumbayi and other Eastern Kasai political figures had met February 23 with CEI President Abbe Apollinaire Malu Malu, who had come to Mbuji-Mayi to explain the electoral law adopted by Parliament and awaiting promulgation. According to Tshilumbayi, Malu Malu explained why registration centers

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could not be reopened. Malu Malu reportedly said the CEI would, however, initiate an extensive civic education campaign to encourage all eligible citizens to vote.

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Tshilumbayi said he, as well as rival political parties, told

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Malu Malu such efforts would be "insufficient" and "nonproductive" as the majority of Kasaians were not registered in the first place. (Note: This argument is false, as nearly 90 percent of the estimated total number of eligible Kasaians -- including 78 percent of those eligible in Eastern Kasai -- registered to vote despite the UDPS boycott. End note.) Tshilumbayi also said the CEI needed to ensure the integrity of the elections process (particularly vote-counting), as he claimed the referendum results in Eastern Kasai were "fraudulent." He added that the UDPS would not accept a "flawed" election.

16. (C) Tshilumbayi insisted to PolOff, though, that the UDPS would take part in elections and expressed his party's desire to see elections take place before June 30. At the same time, Tshilumbayi warned that if the UDPS were not "included" in

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the process, the final election results would be contested in Eastern Kasai. Tshilumbayi mused that in such a scenario, there would certainly be violence and demonstrations in Mbuji-Mayi and elsewhere in the province, and that the UDPS could not control everything its followers do. He quickly added, however, that the UDPS would never advocate such action.

CIVIL SOCIETY SINGS FROM THE SAME SONGBOOK

17. (C) A meeting with civil society representatives in Mbuji-Mayi revealed similar attitudes with regard to the alleged mistreatment of the UDPS and the Kasais. Civil society provincial president Dr. Nkongolo told PolOff that

citizens of Eastern Kasai are "convinced" they are the object of a "plot" by the international community and the transitional government to marginalize the province politically and economically. Nkongolo called for the reopening of registration centers and argued that CIAT should pressure the CEI to restart the process.

18. (C) Nkongolo and other civil society officials echoed UDPS concerns about the CEI's preparedness for elections. Nkongolo claimed that during the referendum, the CEI was unable to dispatch voting kits and equipment to all the anticipated voting sites. In addition, much of the equipment broke down, and elections workers themselves were not well trained. Nkongolo concluded that the CEI was not prepared to overcome similar challenges during national elections, which risks delegitimizing the electoral process.

19. (C) Civil society's most pressing concern, though, was that Eastern Kasai would not be adequately represented in the new government. Nkongolo said because so many people did not register, the province would be under-represented in the National Assembly. PolOff explained that reopening the registration process was impossible, given the time constraints of the electoral calendar. PolOff urged civil society to urge those who had registered to vote, so that their voices would be heard. Several members of the delegation, however, said they did not understand how they could change the system after elections, and did not believe strong voter turnout would improve their representation at the national level.

WARNINGS FROM OTHER CORNERS

10. (C) PolOff also met with provincial governor Dominique Kanku (of the Congolese Liberation Movement -- MLC) and with representatives of the People's Party for Reconstruction and Development (PPRD). While these officials touted their own prospects for the elections, they also warned about the possibility of violence from UDPS supporters. Kanku, who attended the meeting with Malu Malu, said UDPS officials were "outraged" by the CEI's decisions and could not understand why they were being kept out of the electoral process. Kanku said Kasaians will not accept elections results if they do not believe the UDPS has been "integrated" into the process. (Note: Kanku himself does not think the UDPS has been excluded from elections, except by their own decisions. End note.) PPRD officials told PolOff they were not necessarily concerned about violence from UDPS followers, but they nonetheless were taking "all necessary measures" to protect themselves "against any outside attack." PPRD provincial president Dr. Kabamba would not elaborate when asked what exactly such threats entailed, but later hinted that he was

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referring to the kind of "popular" demonstrations (often orchestrated by the UDPS) which occur in Mbuji-Mayi.

11. (C) Despite their concerns over the conduct of the UDPS, PPRD and MLC officials believed their parties could succeed in the opposition party's home base. Governor Kanku said the MLC was very strong in the province and had laid out a "broad vision" for the DRC which would certainly benefit the people of Eastern Kasai. Kanku explained at length how the divisions between MLC chairman Jean-Pierre Bemba and former MLC Executive Secretary Olivier Kamitatu would have no effect on the MLC's political strategy. PPRD officials similarly played up their electoral chances, promising to fix roads, invest in agriculture, and provide electricity and water if elected. Officials from both parties said they respected the necessity to hold elections and install a new government by June 30. Kanku and Kabamba said the logistical problems facing elections workers were significant in Eastern Kasai, but it was absolutely necessary to complete the transitional process within the current timeframe.

CEI LOOKS MORE PREPARED, BUT STILL LACKS FUNDS

¶12. (C) PolOff visited CEI headquarters in Mbuji-Mayi February 24 and found its offices in much better shape than those in Kananga (reftel). In a large building, which had working electricity (unlike many others in the city), dozens of workers appeared very busy. The activity was likely the result of a final round of payment to elections workers scheduled for that day, as several dozen people were waiting outside the CEI offices for their pay. CEI provincial coordinator Hubert Tshiswaka told PolOff the CEI was prepared to begin civic education campaigns and registering candidates. He added that all of the CEI's agents for Eastern Kasai had received training for the pre-electoral period as well.

¶13. (C) Responding to questions about the CEI's performance during the referendum, Tshiswaka said his office had learned many lessons from that experience and were working to correct problems before the national elections. Tshiswaka said he told CEI President Malu Malu that the Mbuji-Mayi office could carry out its mission, but it also needed more funding for transportation and other logistical operations. Tshiswaka said his office has not received any additional financial support from Kinshasa since the referendum. Consequently, many of the CEI's cars and other vehicles are inoperable because the CEI lacks money to buy spare parts. Tshiswaka said he was still waiting a reply from CEI offices in Kinshasa as to whether more resources would be made available to address these problems. CEI officials in Kinshasa told PolOff March 8 they were revising their operational budgets for the provinces and would take the Mbuji-Mayi's appeal into account.

COMMENT: IT ALL DEPENDS ON THE UDPS

¶14. (C) The political fate of Eastern Kasai rests in the hands of the UDPS. Should the party decide to drop its request to reopen voter registration centers and participate actively in elections, it is unlikely widespread violence or demonstrations will erupt in Mbuji-Mayi or throughout the province. If, however, the UDPS continues to demand "equitable treatment" and fails to engage in the electoral process, some UDPS supporters will use the occasion to incite civil disturbances. Some provincial party leaders are beginning to see the error of the party's prior decision to boycott the process, and are pushing for a more active UDPS role in the elections. Much of the rank-and-file of the UDPS, however, follows the pronouncements of party leader Etienne Tshisekedi. For now, Eastern Kasai is calm, but as with

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Western Kasai, the possibility of unrest is real. End comment.
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